

US Congress authorizes new sanctions against Russia, arms shipments to Ukraine

Niles Williamson
15 December 2014

In an inflammatory move the US Senate unanimously passed a bill late Saturday night authorizing President Barack Obama to implement a raft of new sanctions against Russia and deliver hundreds of millions of dollars of lethal and nonlethal military aid to the Ukrainian government.

The Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014, which also passed in the House by a unanimous vote, is currently awaiting the president's signature.

Speaking Thursday to a group of CEOs at a meeting of the White House's export council, Obama indicated that he would not support further sanctions against Russia unless the United States' European partners agreed to new sanctions as well.

"The notion that we can simply ratchet up sanctions further and further and further, and then ultimately, Putin changes his mind I think is a miscalculation," he said. "What will ultimately lead to Russia making a strategic decision is if they recognize that Europe is standing with us and will be in it for the long haul and we are, in fact, patient."

A spokesman for the Russian Foreign ministry told reporters on Friday that the measure was "deeply confrontational" and would "destroy cooperation." He added that Russia, "won't succumb to blackmail, won't compromise its national interests and won't allow interference in its internal affairs." Responding to the passage of the bill, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told *Interfax*, "Undoubtedly, we will not be able to leave this without a response."

Most provocatively the legislation authorizes the distribution of \$350 million in military aid to the Kiev regime over the next three years. Included in this potential cache are anti-tank and anti-armor weapons, grenade launchers, mortars, machine guns, as well as surveillance drones. The Obama administration has so

far resisted official calls from the regime in Kiev for the distribution of lethal military aid.

The bill also gives the president the authority to apply a new tranche of economic sanctions against Russian companies as well as individuals that may invest in the Russian energy sector.

In particular, the legislation singles out for possible sanctions Rosoboronexport, the state firm which oversees the export of the majority of Russian manufactured arms and other military equipment. The legislation calls for the president to implement sanctions on Rosoboronexport and Russia military equipment manufacturers if they are found to be transferring weapons into Syria, Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia.

The bill also authorizes sanctions to be placed on individuals that make investments in special Russian crude oil projects; sanctions against Gazprom if it is determined to be withholding significant natural gas supplies from any NATO member state as well as Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia; and additional licensing requirements on exports from Russia's energy sector.

While it authorized new sanctions and arms shipments the Congress has provided Obama significant leeway in implementing the sanctions as well as delivering any lethal military equipment. A provision in the bill allows the president to waive sanctions for reasons of "national security."

In addition to authorizing new sanctions and the delivery of arms the bill calls for the US government to encourage the Ukrainian defense industry to seek "alternative markets" outside of Russia for the export of military hardware produced in the country.

A key provision was ultimately dropped from the bill, which would have given major non-NATO ally status to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova as a means of

ensuring unanimous support for the bill in both houses of Congress.

The bill was coauthored by Democratic Senator Robert Menendez, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Republican Bob Corker, the committee's ranking member.

Speaking to reporters about the passage of the bill, Senator Corker said, "Unanimous support for our bill demonstrates a firm commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and to making sure Putin pays for his assault on freedom and security in Europe."

Meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry in Rome on Sunday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stressed that any attempt to further pressure Russia with economic sanctions would prove to be unsuccessful. He called for the ceasefire between Kiev and the pro-Russian separatists in the east signed in November to be upheld by both sides.

"In the context of the situation in southeastern Ukraine, the consistent implementation of the Minsk agreements is paramount, as well as the convening of a contact group for this purpose as early as possible," he said.

According to the latest figures from the UN, more than 4,600 people have been killed and more than 10,000 wounded in fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. The November ceasefire has largely held, with the last week seeing some of the lowest numbers of casualties since the outbreak of the conflict.

Fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine not long after a US and German supported fascist-backed coup ousted the democratically elected President Victor Yanukovich in February after he refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU.

The UN estimates that more than 1 million people have been displaced since fighting began in April. More than 540,000 Ukrainians have been internally displaced and another 560,000 externally displaced, with the majority fleeing to Russia.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact